YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Student summaries of Sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat Kedoshim**

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**Dedicated in loving memory of**

**Dr. Saul G. Agus, z”l**

**Whose 5th Yarzheit is Iyar 3**

**Marcelle A. Agus and**

**the Agus /Fox Families**

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**In memory of Moshe Avigdor Perlstein HY"D,  
one of the "Lamed-Hey” platoon of Palmach Harel,**

**murdered defending the Etzion bloc, during the War of Independence.  
Yehi zikhro barukh.**

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**"You shall be Holy"**

**Sicha of Harav Baruch Gigi[[1]](#footnote-1)\***

Adapted by Emanuel Meyer and Binyamin Frankel

Translated by David Strauss

### *Acharei Mot – Kedoshim*

*Parashat Kedoshim* follows *Parashat Acharei Mot,* and this pair of *parashot* serves as a transition between the two halves of the book of *Vayikra.* The first half of the book deals with the tribe of the priests, including the details concerning the sacrifices and the laws of sanctity and purity. The second half of the book, in contrast, is addressed to all of Israel.

*Chazal* refer to the book of *Vayikra* as “*Torat Kohanim*,” "the law of the priests," apply this designation not only to the first half of the book, but to the entire book. Even the second half of the book, which speaks to the entire “kingdom of priests,” is part of the law of the priests.

*Parashot Acharei Mot* and *Kedoshim* are often read together. When *Chazal* connected two *parashot* to be read on the same Shabbat for reasons connected to the yearly calendar, we can generally identify a connection between them*.* In this case, the two *parashot* are a transition between the two parts of the book.

*Parashat Acharei Mot* opens with the Yom Kippur service and the rest of the *parasha* deals with various laws, including the laws of forbidden sexual relations. *Parashat* *Kedoshim*, after that, brings a multitude of laws dealing with all areas of life. These laws appear under the heading, "You shall be holy," words that are addressed to all of Israel. This heading is also reflected later in the *parasha,* among other places in the section dealing once again with the laws of forbidden sexual relations.

There is a striking difference between the two sections dealing with the laws of forbidden sexual relations. As opposed to *Parashat Kedoshim*, where the concept of holiness is mentioned over and over again, this concept does not appear even once in all of *Acharei Mot.*

Indeed, even one who misses the differences in the wording and the appearance of the concept of holiness, and even one who listens to the Torah reading with only half an ear, will still notice the sharp transition between the two *parashot*,which is emphasized in the unique opening of *Parashat Kedoshim*:

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: You shall be holy; for I, the Lord your God, am holy. (*Vayikra* 19:1-2)

God speaks here to all the congregation of the children of Israel. The last time that all of the congregation of the children of Israel gathered together was in *Parashat Vayakhel*, around the *Mishkan*, and before that at the revelation at Mount Sinai. *Parashat Kedoshim* seems more connected to the revelation at Mount Sinai, though it is possible that we have here a combination of the two aforementioned gatherings – that of the *Mishkan*, the purpose of which was "that I shall dwell among them," and the revelation at Mount Sinai.

### The Ten Commandments and *Parashat Kedoshim*

It is clear that *Parashat Kedoshim* is closely connected to the Ten Commandments. *Chazal* even viewed the *mitzvot* in our *parasha* as expressions of the Ten Commandments, and they therefore categorized all of the commandments in our *parasha* under the heading of the various Commandments:

R. Chiyya taught: This *parasha* was said in the presence of the entire congregation because most of the essential parts of the Torah depend upon it.

R. Levi said: Because the Ten Commandments are included within it: "I am the Lord your God" (*Shemot* 20:2), and it is written here: "I am the Lord your God" (*Vayikra* 19:2). "You shall have no other gods" (*Shemot* 20:2), and it is written here: "Nor make to yourselves molten gods" (*Vayikra* 19:3)…. (*Vayikra Rabba* 24)

*Chazal* connected "most of the essential parts of the Torah" to the Ten Commandments, leading us to consider the centrality of the Ten Commandments.

According to the *gemara* in *Berakhot* (12a), *kri’at* *Shema* originally included the Ten Commandments, and the only reason this recitation was stoppedwas the insinuations of the *minim*. The *Yerushalmi* goes even further, explaining how all of the Ten Commandments appear in the *Shema* itself. It would appear that according to this approach, the essence of reciting the *Shema* lies in the Ten Commandments contained within it, which express the essence of the Torah.

This centrality is also reflected in the way that R. Saadya Gaon counts the *mitzvot.* As opposed to the other counters of the *mitzvot*, R. Saadya's starting point is classifying all of the *mitzvot* under the headings of the Ten Commandments. Sometimes the classification seems reasonable, while at other times it seems less so – but this is the way that he related to the *mitzvot.*  Each of the 613 *mitzvot* draws its contents and laws from the Ten Commandments that were given to the people of Israel.

In this context, we can note a striking difference between the Ten Commandments and the *mitzvot* included in *Parashat Kedoshim.* In the Ten Commandments – both those in *Parashat Yitro* and those in *Parashat Va-Etchanan* – there is a clear division of the *mitzvot.* We can see where each commandment begins and where it ends. Although there are disagreements regarding whether "I am the Lord your God" is counted as one of the Ten Commandments and whether "You shall have no other gods" and "You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them" are counted as two separate Commandments, most of the Commandments are clearly differentiated from each other. It is absolutely clear that honoring one's parents is one Commandment, that "You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain" is another Commandment, and that "You shall not steal" stands apart as yet another Commandment.

*Parashat Kedoshim*, however, is different. The reader is puzzled in the face of the busy and un-organized sequence of commandments in the *parasha*. The connection between one *mitzva* and the next is unclear, and the general structure of the *parasha* is also nebulous.

### The two accounts of creation

This difference between the Ten Commandments as they are presented in the account of the revelation at Mount Sinai and in the commandments as they appear in *Parashat Kedoshim* recalls the difference between the two accounts of creation in chapters 1 and 2 of the book of *Bereishit*.

Chapter 1 presents the creation in clear order. Each day has its own closing: "And it was evening and it was morning," and then the next day starts: "And God said." The truth is that we understand nothing about the contents of these verses (and one who thinks that he understands the account of creation most often does not), but at least the order and the structure are clear.

Chapter 2, on the other hand, is in total disorder. As opposed to chapter 1 where the plants are created before man, in chapter 2 it is emphasized:

No shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. (*Bereishit* 2:5)

There is a clear gap here - the absence of the exemplary order that we saw in chapter 1 and the lack of organization in content and structure. What is the reason for this difference? Why was chapter 2 written in such disorder?

The answer to this question is connected to God's place in the respective accounts. In chapter 1, God stands above creation, creating one thing after another. In chapter 2, on the other hand, God is found in the garden itself:

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden toward the cool of the day; and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (*Bereishit* 3:8)

God's presence in the garden is what creates that feeling of cloudiness, that lack of clarity. This also explains the difference between the Ten Commandments in *Parashat Yitro* and those in *Parashat Kedoshim.* In *Yitro*,there is no mention of God. He appears only at the beginning in that distant declaration: “I am the Lord your God." In *Parashat Kedoshim*, however, God is found among the people, in the congregation of the people of Israel. This is reflected in the motif found at the conclusion of many of the *mitzvot* found therein:

You shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. (19:3)

And you shall not glean your vineyard, neither shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God. (19:10)

And you shall not swear by My name falsely, so that you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord. (19:12)

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. (19:18)

God is in all of these commandments and, in fact, in life, whether it is "You shall not go gossip with your people" or "You shall keep my Sabbaths." This is a kingdom of priests; this is a holy nation.

### You shall be holy – even in the life of Israel

How can we be that "holy nation"? How can we reach that level of "You shall be holy"? Of course, the priest who serves in the Temple lives a life of holiness. But we are dealing with the entire congregation! How can all of Israel, each person in his place and in his situation, live a holy life?

This is connected to the way in which a person lives his life. A person can get up in the morning and go to *minyan*,and then go off to work, go to *Mincha* and hear a daily *halakha* afterwards, and then at the end of the day participate in another *shiur* before *Maariv.* The life of such a person, who finds himself in an optimal and exceptional situation, is filled with time dedicated to the service of God. But this still does not ensure that he will live in holiness. His life does not define the consciousness with which he lives his life.

This person can feel that he is serving God three full hours of the day, and the rest of his time and energy he invests in his work. Those ten other hours he dedicates to his employer. This is not the desired situation.

Man must live his life in constant awareness and consciousness that he is a servant of God. Even when he is dealing with computers, medicine, or law – he is serving God. It is not that he dedicates ten hours to his employer, but rather that he dedicates twenty-four hours to the Creator of the Universe. This is the meaning of "In all your ways, know Him." In this way, it is possible to reach the level of "You shall be holy."

This is why the Ramban notes the problem of a *naval be-reshut haTorah*, a scoundrel with Torah license. As stated, one can act completely according to what is stated in the book and still not reach that level of holiness that the Torah demands of us. He still may not fulfill that very impressive and dramatic directive – "You shall be holy." Strict Halakha does not address all aspects of a person's behavior. A person must dedicate his time and energy, his power and his consciousness, to the service of God.

In the book of *Vayikra,* the Torah clarifies two contradictory objectives. One is defining and delineating the realm of the holy – only the priests, only in the Temple, only in a state of purity. Here we find precise and detailed laws intended to describe with exactitude the laws that govern the priestly tribe. Paralleling this objective, the second half of the book expands the concept of holiness in all realms – to the entire kingdom of priests and to all spheres of life. Here we find commandments that relate to the daily life of a person who does not find himself at all times in the world of clear holiness.

This area, this purpose of "Let all your actions be for the sake of Heaven," can always be improved upon. It is always possible to aspire for more, to reach a higher level of holiness.

Here it is important to clarify another point. R. Kook (*Ein Ayah*, part II, *Ma'aser Sheni* 15) noted that a sense of a need for constant improvement, that "more is always possible," can sometimes lead a person to despair. The fact that a person always tries to go further and never stops to look backward and to feel satisfied with the way that he has already come is lethal and can bring a person to a point of total paralysis.

R. Kook suggests that from time to time, one should stop the course of his life, that every few years he should put a brake on the progress he has made – and look back. He should rejoice in his accomplishments and the place that he has reached. It is possible that today, when people are even more prone to sink into a state of depression, there is room to stop even more frequently. It should, however, be noted that here too one must proceed with caution, as one may reach a state of inappropriate pride – and R. Kook was aware of this danger as well.

It is this combination of constant striving along with the joy and satisfaction with what one has already accomplished that can lead a person to that holiness that stands at the center of *Parashat Kedoshim*, from the beginning of the *parasha* – "You shall be holy" – until the end of the *parasha*, which also focuses on holiness:

And you shall be holy to Me; for I the Lord am holy and have set you apart from the peoples, that you should be Mine. (*Vayikra* 20:26)

May we all be worthy of this.

1. \* This *sicha* was delivered at *Seuda Shelishit* on *Shabbat Parashat Kedoshim*  5772. This version was not reviewed by Rav Gigi. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)